

## milon flexes its muscles

**A few years ago, the Schwabian manufacturer of fitness equipment was a „nobody“ in the industry. Today, milon controls approximately 30% of the German market.**

**By Stephanie Geiger**

Generations of students remember their school fitness circuit training with dread involving as it did skipping ropes, chin ups and push-ups, all in rapid succession. However, the fitness equipment manufacturer milon from Emersacker - a community of 1400 people, 25 kilometres west of Augsburg - was not deterred by this and instead successfully integrated the circuit training principle into its fitness equipment.

Mario Görlach came up with the idea. The now 45-year-old president of sales for milon was once well-known as a successful wrestler in East Germany. In the absence of available training machines, Görlach designed and built fitness equipment himself to optimise his own strength training.

The equipment, which Görlach now sells, has little to do with those original devices from the East German era. Rather, they are compact high-tech wonders. Instead of metal weights, they work the muscles through electronically-controlled resistance. This allows an almost unlimited number of settings to make the training more effective. The personal training information is also stored on a smart card, developed by milon and now available.

At the core of the milon training circuit are twelve training stations that work all the main muscle groups and the cardiovascular system. The intervals are measured precisely and the circuit is completed in only seventeen and a half minutes. Even if training is only twice a week - thirty five minutes on the strength machines plus ten minutes on a bike, treadmill or stepper – it should be enough to achieve training success. A comparative study by the Institute of Sports Science at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg has found that milon's circuit equipment is superior to conventional exercise equipment.

Unlike a few years ago, milon is now a large player in the fitness market. "Back then we were just a small innovative company known only by insiders," says Hubert Haupt, 41. The former DTM driver for Audi joined milon in 2007. The number of employees has since then increased from thirty to near one hundred, with the market share now nearing thirty percent.

The company's history goes back 40 years. It was founded as Miha Maschinen GmbH in 1970. Miha gained early recognition in 1972 for its release of the first tennis ball machine. Even in the eighties, Miha was manufacturing fully electronic strength machines; experimenting with smart cards and fitness equipment for circuit training.

The big breakthrough came with re-launching the brand in 2008 and success of the milon circuit, which also won an innovation award. Today, milon produces 33 kinds of fitness equipment - from abductor to calf machines - and runs its own academy that trains fitness staff Germany-wide, and even produces its own fitness videos through milon TV. Its subsidiary, milon Software, not only develops the software for smart cards used in the equipment but also develops complete IT packages, from accounting to membership-management programs, for fitness clubs and leisure facilities.

Some success can also be attributed to fitness training developing into a sport over the last years. According to the DSSV (German Sports Club Association) last year there were almost 6,000 gyms operating in Germany, with around 7 million members training. The year before, there were only 5.9

million. The industry has a turnover of near €3.4 billion and rising. "People are increasingly more willing to invest in their health," says Refit Kamberovic, managing director of DSSV.

"Today there is hardly a market that promises such a large potential for growth," says Haupt, a shareholder in milon. He believes that the health insurance companies will soon even help pay for milon training equipment. If every insured person regularly trained for strength and endurance on milon's machines, the health insurance companies could save up to an estimated 16 billion Euro, according to Wuppertal sports scientist, Theodor Stemper.

However, gym owners must be prepared to invest because milon equipment is not cheap. It costs approximately €100,000 for a milon circuit. A steep price, especially considering there are similar products produced by competitors for half the price. It is a lot of money; the manufacturer knows it too, so it has helped form a financial services company that allows club owners to finance their purchase of milon equipment.

It is a concept that has caught on. Mario Wenzel, for example, operator of the Injoy med-fitness gyms in the north of Munich, is very satisfied with milon's fitness equipment. In his opinion, they are the reason why customer turnover has remained at only thirty percent in his club. The industry average is fifty percent, he says. milon is on the money in any case. In the last five years, the company increased its turnover, year on year, by twenty percent to thirty million Euros in 2009.

However, those in Emersacker will not rest despite their business success. A few months ago, milon launched a machine that can be specifically used for cancer therapy. Hubert Haupt from milon also has some new ideas for the milon circuit in the fitness area. "Just like in Formula 1 racing. The innovation used there," says the former DTM driver, "also flows into the normal cars."